

Dear Editor

The Dáil goes into summer recess this week. It is due to sit again on Tuesday, September 19. The next column will be sent to you on Friday, September 22. Thank you for your continued support.

Tim Ryan

Liffey Champion

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

Rental crisis now out of control

The rental situation is out of control, Social Democrat Deputy Catherine Murphy told the Dáil. A three-bedroom semi-detached house in Lucan now costs €2,200 per month, she said. “Why would it not drive wage inflation?” she asked. “When people argue with their landlords, even in a rent pressure zone, there is only one winner. Many are ignoring the 4% cap. We should have a fuller debate on this issue where we focus on solutions that are very obvious.”

Speaking during a debate on housing, she said it is frustrating that the scale of the housing emergency continues to be denied. “We are told there are 90,000 people on the waiting list but that is nonsense,” she said. “There are 90,000 applications but they must be multiplied by three as they are not all single people. That gives 270,000 men, women and children on the waiting list. It is equal to the total population of five counties, Carlow, Longford, Sligo, Roscommon and Monaghan combined. We do not even count some people, such as those who could move out of direct provision but are stuck because they have nowhere to go.”

Deputy Murphy said she recently discovered that there were only four staff in the delivery unit of the Department of Housing. “How do we expect to become effective in delivering houses with such a complement?” she asked. “Two years ago the Social Democrats called for the establishment of a national housing delivery agency, to tie in with the Housing Agency and the Housing Finance Agency to perform the function of project-managing large sites to give economies of scale and mixed tenure. I still believe that such a body is necessary because it will drive down the cost of building houses.”

Fine Gael Deputy Bernard Durkan said in Kildare North, for example, there is need for nothing less than 1,000 houses at this stage to stabilise the market, provide the urgently required housing and stem the flow of homeless persons. “The problem is in the here and now, not two years down the road,” he said.

“I suggest we have an emergency plan to deliver serviced sites,” he said. “The local authorities could do this, as they have sites available. Some of us have done this and availed of them in the past. Incidentally, at the peak of the boom I was involved in the development of a number of serviced sites in my constituency, comprising about 100 houses built for those on the local authority housing list. When they were finished, they were exactly twice the

value of what they had cost to build. The local committee had to pay €25,000 for each for the sites, while the approved housing bodies received them for €1. That was the difference. I cannot for the life of me understand why we cannot do more of that to deliver houses quickly.”

O’Rourke highlights problems with Home Care packages

Problems with the assessment of people for Home Care packages were raised in the Dáil by Deputy Frank O’Rourke. As an example, he cited the case of North Kildare constituent who is holding up a bed in a hospital because different experts and medical professionals have recommended that that person needs 21 hours of home care support to help support the family and friends in the home.

“Currently, only 13 hours are allocated,” he said. “There is a lack of connection and dialogue between the relevant stakeholders to put the appropriate Home Care package in place for that person,” he said.

In another case, he said seven showers per week were allocated to a particular person. Everyone thought it was happening. Three months later the family contacted Deputy O’Rourke to ask why it was not happening and it was during that meeting he found out that while the showers had been allocated, the family did not know it had been put in place and the end-user was not getting the service. “That is another issue of communication and disconnect and a lack of follow through,” he said. “The real loser here is the end-user. There should be follow-up with the HSE when the service is allocated to check in with the end user and make sure that the service is in place, if the person is happy with it and if the service provider is carrying out the service to the highest standards.”

In response, Minister of State Jim Daly said national guidelines setting out standard procedures for providers of home supports were introduced in 2011. “A procurement framework for Home Care services came into effect in 2012,” he said. “This requires service providers to meet defined minimum standards applied to services procured by the HSE. The tender arrangements are reviewed regularly and the current arrangements which commenced on 1 September 2016 will run for a period of two years. The Deputy will be aware that arrangements for Home Care have developed over the years with a significant local focus, and there is considerable variation in access to services in different parts of the country. There is a need for a uniform approach to assessment of need, and the HSE is in the process of introducing a single assessment tool across Home Care.”

Lawless introduces legislation to regulate drones

New legislation to regulate drones was introduced in the Dáil by North Kildare Fianna Fáil Deputy James Lawless.

“The issue of insurance arises as the possibility of collision with property or persons is always a live one,” he said. “Criminality is also an issue as drones unfortunately lend themselves to criminal activities of surveillance and digital capture.”

“In Ireland, Intel recently acquired Movidius, which manufactures hardware which has applications in drone cameras,” he said. “Huge global companies are at play in this market. Within the National University of Ireland Maynooth, there is a drone technology incubation hub. There has been rapid growth in the commercial and hobbyist areas in Ireland, with multiple flight schools instructing people in the use of drones and drone piloting. There is an emerging industry among people who operate on behalf of State agencies, Departments and commercial enterprises. They are well qualified to conduct surveys. The hobbyist sector is also on the rise. In light of their increasing affordability, these devices now appear everywhere - from children's Santa lists to Smyths Toys on every main street. They have become a very accessible albeit sophisticated toy.”

Deputy Lawless said there is, however, also a need to survey the industry and the existing regulatory framework to ensure that any gaps are filled and that appropriate support and regulation are provided.

The Government did not oppose the Bill at its initial stage.